

# Homeland Security Panel Headed for Upgrade?

By Ben Pershing

ROLL CALL STAFF

With the Select Homeland Security Committee now just over a year old, House Members and aides are wondering what it will look like on its second birthday.

As a select panel, the committee includes a Speaker-designated roster made up of the chairmen of the Appropriations, Rules, Transportation and Infrastructure, Judiciary, Armed Services, Science, Energy and Commerce, and Intelligence committees.

While Republican leaders assembled that powerhouse lineup for the ostensible purpose of allowing cooperation and communication between Homeland Security and other committees, the unspoken but understood reason for it was so that other chairmen could make sure the new panel didn't encroach on their turf.

Now, a movement is afoot among some lawmakers to make Homeland Security permanent so it won't have to be renewed each Congress and, more importantly, to make it a standing committee. Such a change would subject future panel roster decisions to the regular steering process and would also allow it to get primary jurisdiction over bills relating to the Homeland Security Department.

"I don't think there's much doubt that the Homeland Security Committee will be made permanent," said its chairman, Rep. Christopher Cox (R-Calif.). "The real question is what precisely will be its jurisdiction."

Cox believes that the committee's turf should generally mirror the changes made through the act that created the Homeland Security Department, which took control of several agencies away from other departments.



File Photo

**"I don't think there's much doubt that the Homeland Security Committee will be made permanent," said Chairman Cox, only that jurisdiction needs to be determined.**

"In order for Congress to do a thorough job of both oversight and authorization of this new department, logically the jurisdiction would track the Homeland Security Act, no more no less," Cox said.

The Homeland Security subcommittee on rules, which is chaired by Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.), has been studying the jurisdiction issue since the panel was first created. The subcommittee is scheduled to hold hearings on the issue next week at which several chairmen of other committees

will testify.

At a subcommittee hearing last September, ex-Speakers Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Tom Foley (D-Wash.) both urged the House to make Homeland Security a permanent standing committee, with Gingrich pointing out that 88 committees and subcommittees in the House and Senate currently have some jurisdiction over the department.

"All of the witnesses at the hearings we've had ... have made very compelling cases for permanency," said Diaz-Balart. "Our study is not complete. I look forward to hearing from the chairmen."

The support of ex-Speakers aside, the main question will be whether those panel chairmen who initially pushed for Homeland Security to be select have changed their views since its inception.

Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Don Young (R-Alaska) has been particularly resistant to making the 1-year-old panel a standing committee, mainly because Transportation — whose turf includes the Coast Guard and the Federal Emergency Management Agency — has the most jurisdiction to lose.

Young spokesman Steve Hansen said his boss still "would prefer [Homeland Security] to remain as it is and not become a permanent committee. ... We have Members over here who have been working on these issues for decades and have a very strong historical background."

But Appropriations Chairman Bill Young (R-Fla.) said that, from his perspective, worries among other chairmen that Homeland Security would rob them of their turf have not been borne out.

"I think there was some concern there, but I don't think that has become a problem," he said.

A senior Republican leadership aide echoed Young's assessment.

"Some of their fears about encroachment have not been realized," said the aide.

John Feehery, spokesman for Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), said, "The Speaker would like it to be a permanent committee," though he was not sure whether his boss also advocates making it a standing panel.

Across the aisle, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) took a different approach than Hastert and did not fill the Homeland Security roster with the top Democrats from other committees.

Ranking member Jim Turner (D-Texas), who is retiring at the end of this Congress, has said repeatedly that he believes the panel should be made a permanent standing committee.

"If you take homeland security seriously, you cannot believe that oversight of this mammoth department can properly be conducted by dozens of House committees and subcommittees," Turner said during a panel hearing last year. "Without a single committee dedicated to oversight, important issues will not get the attention they deserve."

Cox and others pointed out that no substantive moves will be made until the end of this Congress. But even though there are plenty of other matters to occupy Republican leaders' time for now, they all are aware that decisions on Homeland Security's future are looming.

"It's out there, and we're going to have to deal with it," a GOP leadership aide said.